

NEWS RELEASE

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources

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The Governor and Key Water Leaders Meet to Address Surface and Groundwater Management Issues

Lincoln, July 29 and 30th

Today, Governor Johanns opened the first session of the 49 member Nebraska Water Policy Task Force. The working group was created this year by the state legislature to examine and find solutions for the equitable and sustainable management of surface and groundwater. The current drought has put pressure on all water users, prompting one Task Force Member to note that “it is so dry in Nebraska that we are pulling ticks off fish”!

The Task Force is composed of representatives of surface and groundwater irrigators, Natural Resource Districts and municipalities from across the state, agricultural organizations, the environmental and recreational communities, power producers, the Department of Natural Resources, the Attorney General’s Office, and Senators on the legislature’s Natural Resources Committee.

The Water Policy Task Force, advocated by Senators Ed Schrock and Elaine Stuhr and created by LB 1003, is mandated to review current laws related to surface and groundwater including the ability to address inequities between surface and groundwater users, the transfer of water or water rights, leasing, and water banking, and to develop proposals and recommendations to bring back to the state legislature. The work of the Task Force will be coordinated by a 14 person Executive Committee composed of a balance group of stakeholder representatives. The first meeting of the Executive Committee was held on the 30th in the State Capitol.

Professional facilitators from CDR Associates, an internationally known collaborative decision making firm located in Boulder, Colorado, were hired by the state to facilitate the meetings of the Task Force and Executive Committee and to help promote efficient and effective deliberations.

The Task Group began its work by identifying the key issues and interests of all concerned parties that will need to be addressed in the eighteen-month process. One task force member noted that “the issues are now on the table, what remains to be done is to find solutions to some very difficult problems, which will be viewed as fair and equitable by both ground and surface water users”.

Future Task Force Meetings have been scheduled in Kearney on September 17th and in Lincoln on January 7th. Task Force meetings will be held from 8:30 to 5:00 p.m., and are open to all members of the public. An Executive Committee meeting will be held on August 20th in Ogallala from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (MST) at the Kingsley Dam Visitor’s Center.

For more information on the Nebraska Water Policy Task Force, see the Department of Natural Resources web site – www.dnr.state.ne.us, or call Jody Gittins, Legal Advisor to the Natural Resources Committee (402) 471-2732 or Ann Bleed, Deputy Director of the Department of Natural Resources (402) 471-0569.

The following is a list of the names and addresses of the Task Force Members.

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